



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
Bureau of the Census
Washington, DC 20233-0001

MEMORANDUM FOR Distribution

From: Cynthia Clark
Associate Director for Methodology and Standards

Subject: Evaluation of the Simplified Enumerator Questionnaire- Item
Nonresponse Analysis

I am pleased to present the executive summary of one of the evaluation studies for the Census 2000 Dress Rehearsal. The dress rehearsal was conducted in three sites — Columbia, South Carolina; Menominee County, Wisconsin; and Sacramento, California. The evaluation studies cover detailed aspects of eight broad areas related to the census dress rehearsal — census questionnaire, address list, coverage measurement, coverage improvement, promotion activities, procedures addressing multiple options for census reporting, field operations, and technology.

The executive summary for each evaluation study is also available on the Census Bureau Internet site (<http://www.census.gov/census2000> and click on the link to “Evaluation”). Copies of the complete report may be obtained by contacting Carnelle Sligh at (301) 457-3525 or by e-mail at carnelle.e.sligh@ccmail.census.gov. Please note that the complete copy of the following reports will not be publically released: reports regarding procedures addressing multiple options for census reporting and the Evaluation of Housing Unit Coverage on the Master Address File.

The evaluations are distributed broadly to promote the open and thorough review of census processes and procedures. The primary purpose of the dress rehearsal is to simulate portions of the environment we anticipate for Census 2000, so we can identify and correct potential problems in the processes. Thus, the purpose of the evaluation studies is to provide analysis to support time critical review and possible refinements of Census 2000 operations and procedures.

The analysis and recommendations in the evaluation study reports are those of staff working on specific evaluations and, thus, do not represent the official position of the Census Bureau. They represent the results of an evaluation of a component of the census plan. They will be used to analyze and improve processes and procedures for Census 2000. The individual evaluation recommendations have not all yet been reviewed for incorporation in the official plan for Census 2000. These evaluation study reports will be used as input to the decision making process to refine the plans for Census 2000.

The Census Bureau will issue a report that synthesizes the recommendations from all the evaluation studies and provides the Census Bureau review of the dress rehearsal operation. This report will also indicate the Census Bureau’s official position on the utilization of these results in the Census 2000 operation. This report will be available July 30th.

Evaluation of the Simplified Enumerator Questionnaire- Item Nonresponse Analysis

April 1999

Courtney N. Stapleton
Planning, Research, and
Evaluation Division

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Simplified Enumerator Questionnaire (SEQ) is an enumerator-administered paper questionnaire used to collect information from households that do not respond to the Census by mail. In the past, questionnaires used by enumerators for nonresponse followup have been cumbersome and awkward for both enumerators and respondents. To improve the nonresponse followup questionnaire, the format of the SEQ has changed dramatically since 1990.

The focus of this evaluation is on questions and methods that have changed since 1990. Results from a motion and time study, observation reports and enumerator debriefings as well as item nonresponse rates will be used to evaluate the SEQ. In this particular report we assess data quality for this new version of the form as measured by item nonresponse. Rates are calculated for the 100 percent items, tenure, and two long form question sequences. Some major findings are:

- Item nonresponse to most of the 100 percent items has decreased since 1990. This may be linked, in part, to the new topic-based format of the SEQ. This format has been kept for use on the Census 2000 SEQ. The decrease in item nonresponse may also be attributed to other changes made to the SEQ.
- Nonresponse to the race question was higher for Hispanics than non-Hispanics. It is likely that this is a result of both the ordering of the race and Hispanic origin questions on the SEQ, as well as the fact that Hispanic respondents have known difficulties distinguishing between the two items. It is recommended that we train interviewers to anticipate problems with these questions (particularly with Hispanic respondents) and prepare them with ways to overcome confusion with the two items.
- Nonresponse to the tenure question has increased considerably on both the short and long form SEQ since 1990. The increased nonresponse is likely a result of its placement on the forms. On the short form, enumerators must now turn to the back of the Dress Rehearsal form to get to the tenure question, while the 1990 short form questionnaire folded out to reveal all questions. On the Dress Rehearsal long form, tenure is placed after the Person 1 long form questions. On the 1990 long form, it followed the 100 percent person questions, but preceded any long form person questions. Since similar long form housing unit items displayed a high nonresponse rate as well, we suspect a large portion of the item nonresponse to these long form items is due to total long form nonresponse. However, there is no easy solution for the placement of the tenure question. The 100 percent items are topic based and do not allow room for additional questions. It is recommended that further research be done to determine the best placement of this question. In addition, special attention should be paid to this phenomenon as responses to tenure during initial phase are crucial to the accuracy of estimation on a coverage measurement survey. Lastly, the importance of this question should be stressed to enumerators during training.
- Item nonresponse to the revised long form disability questions (approximately 15% in South Carolina; 22% in Sacramento; and 7% in Menominee), and the first

question of the grandparents sequence is high (nonresponse in South Carolina, Sacramento, and Wisconsin was 15.4%, 25.0%, and 13.3%, respectively). Since other long form items with age screeners displayed a high nonresponse rate as well, we suspect a large portion of the item nonresponse to these long form items is due to total long form nonresponse. This appears to be a phenomenon of the SEQ, as item nonresponse rates to these questions were considerably lower on the mail forms. However, since the rate of missing data for the two new/revised series of questions are comparable to other long form items, there are no recommendations for changing these based on item nonresponse.